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Richard Goldstein
44 Toscana Way East
Rancho Mirage CA 92270-1977

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OFFICE OF PETITIONS

ON PETITION

In re Patent No. 6,711,268 :
Issue date: March 23, 2004 :
Application No. 09/849,820 :
Filed: May 4, 2001 :
For: AUTOMATIC STEREO/MONAUURAL :
HEADPHONE :

This is a decision on the petition under 37 CFR 1.378(b), filed November 1, 2010, to accept an unavoidably delayed payment of a maintenance fee for the above-identified patent.

The petition is **DISMISSED**.

If reconsideration of this decision is desired, a petition for reconsideration under 37 CFR 1.378(e) must be filed within TWO (2) MONTHS from the mail date of this decision. No extension of this 2-month time limit can be granted under 37 CFR 1.136(a) or (b). Any such petition for reconsideration must be accompanied by the petition fee of \$400. The petition for reconsideration should include an exhaustive attempt to provide the lacking item noted below, since, after a decision on the petition for reconsideration, no further reconsideration or review of the matter will be undertaken by the Director.

The patent issued March 23, 2004. The 3 ½ year maintenance fee could have been paid from March 23, 2007 through September 23, 2007, or with a surcharge during the period from September 24, 2007 through March 23, 2008. The Office has no record of receiving the 3 ½ year maintenance fee. Accordingly, the patent expired on March 24, 2008.

Statute and Regulation

37 CFR 1.378(a) provides that the Director may accept the payment of any maintenance fee due on a patent based on an expiration of the patent, if, upon petition, the delay in payment of the maintenance fee is shown to the satisfaction of the Director to have been unavoidable or unintentional. The appropriate surcharge set forth in § 1.20(i) must be paid as a condition of accepting payment of the maintenance fee. The surcharges set at 37 CFR 1.20(i) are established pursuant to 35 U.S.C. 41(c) and, therefore, are not subject to small entity provisions of 35 U.S.C. 41(h). No separate petition fee is required for this petition. If the Director accepts payment of the maintenance fee upon petition, the patent shall be considered as not having expired but will be subject to the intervening rights and provisions of 35 U.S.C. 41(c)(2).

The patent statute at 35 U.S.C. 41(c)(1) provides as follows:

"The Commissioner may accept the payment of any maintenance fee required by subsection (b) of this section... at any time after the six-month grace period if the delay is shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner to have been unavoidable."

The statute's promulgating rule, 37 CFR 1.378(b), provides that any petition to accept the delayed payment of a maintenance fee must include the following:

- (1) the required maintenance fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.20(e) - (g);
- (2) the surcharge set forth in 37 CFR 1.20(i)(1); and
- (3) a showing that the delay was unavoidable since reasonable care was taken to ensure that the maintenance fee would be paid timely and that the petition was filed promptly after the patentee was notified of, or otherwise became aware of, the expiration of the patent. The required showing must enumerate the steps taken to ensure timely payment of the maintenance fee, the date and the manner in which patentee became aware of the expiration of the patent, and the steps taken to file the petition promptly.

Furthermore, an adequate showing requires a statement by all persons with direct knowledge of the cause of the delay, setting forth the facts as they know them. Copies of all documentary evidence referred to in a statement should be furnished as exhibits to the statement.

Opinion

In the instant petition, inventor Arthur Barry Colegrave asserts that the delay in payment of the 3 ½ year maintenance fee was unavoidable because he mailed a completed maintenance fee transmittal form, a check for \$490.00, a change of correspondence address, and a cover letter via USPS first class mail to the USPTO on October 21, 2007 .

The showing of record is inadequate to establish unavoidable delay within the meaning of 37 CFR 1.378(b)(3).

Petitions for the delayed payment of maintenance fees under 35 U.S.C. 41(c)(1) are treated under the same standard as petitions for revival of abandoned applications under 35 U.S.C. 133 because both statutory provisions use the same language, i.e., "unavoidable" delay. Ray v. Leyman, 55 F.3d 606, 608-609, 34 USPQ2d 1786, 1787 (Fed. Cir. 1995) (quoting In re Patent No. 4,409,763, 7 USPQ2d 1798, 1800 (Comm'r Pat. 1988), aff'd, Rydeen v. Quigg, 748 F. Supp. 900, 16 USPQ2d 1876 (D.D.C. 1990), aff'd, 937 F.2d 623 (Fed. Cir. 1991) (table), cert. denied, 502 U.S. 1075 (1992)). Decisions on reviving abandoned applications have adopted the reasonably prudent person standard in determining if the delay was unavoidable as follows:

The word 'unavoidable'....is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business. It permits them in the exercise of this care to rely upon the ordinary and trustworthy agencies of mail and telegraph, worthy and reliable employees, and such other means and instrumentalities as are usually employed in such important business. If unexpectedly, or through unforeseen fault or imperfection of these agencies and instrumentalities, there occurs a failure, it may properly be said to be unavoidable, all other conditions of promptness in its rectification being present.

In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-515 (1912) (quoting Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33 (Comm'r Pat. 1887); see also Winkler v. Ladd, 221 F. Supp. 550, 552, 138 USPQ 666, 167-168 (D.D.C. 1963), aff'd, 143 USPQ 172 (D.C. Cir. 1963); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 139, 141 (1913). In addition, decisions on revival are made on a "case by case basis, taking all the facts and circumstances into account." Smith v. Massinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 USPQ 977, 982 (D.C. Cir. 1982). The requirement in 35 U.S.C. 133 for a showing of unavoidable delay requires not only a showing that the delay which resulted in the abandonment of the application was unavoidable (or expiration of the patent as it applies to 35 U.S.C. 41(c)(1)), but also a showing of unavoidable delay from the time an applicant becomes aware of the abandonment of the application until the filing of a petition to revive (or a petition under 37 CFR 1.378(b) to reinstate the patent under 35 U.S.C. 41(c)(1)). See In re Application of Takao, 17 USPQ2d 1155 (Comm'r Pat. 1990). Finally, a petition cannot be granted where a petitioner has failed to meet his or her burden of establishing that the delay was "unavoidable." Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 316-317, 5 USPQ2d 1130, 1131-1132 (N.D. Ind. 1987).

Patentee purportedly mailed a completed maintenance fee transmittal form, a check for \$490.00, a change of correspondence address, and a cover letter via USPS first class mail to the USPTO on October 21, 2007. The Office has no record of receiving the mailing.

If the Office has no record of receiving correspondence, there are only two ways to get the Office to recognize a date of deposit in USPS first class mail as the filing date for the correspondence that was not received in the Office. In general:

- (1) Petitioner must provide a copy of the original document with an affixed certificate of mailing listing the desired date as the date of deposit (See 37 CFR 1.8) OR
- (2) Petitioner must provide a copy of an Express Mail label showing a "date-in" of the desired date and a copy of the document that contains a reference to the Express Mail receipt number (37 CFR 1.10).

Petitioner has provided a copy of a cover letter, dated October 18, 2007, and a copy of a check payable to the USPTO for \$490.00.

No certificate of mailing showing an October 21, 2007 date of deposit is affixed to the cover letter. It appears petitioner did not utilize certificate of mailing practice or Express Mail service when he mailed in the 3 ½ year payment.

A "reasonably prudent person" would file papers or fees in compliance with 37 CFR 1.8 or 1.10 to ensure their timely filing in the PTO, as well as preserve adequate evidence of such filing. A delay caused by an applicant's failure to file papers or fees in compliance with 37 CFR 1.8 and 1.10 does not constitute "unavoidable" delay. See Krahn v. Commissioner, 15 USPQ2d 1823, 1825, (E.D. Va 1990); see also MPEP 711.03(c)(III)(C)(2)

Furthermore, it is noted that the amount of the 3 ½ year maintenance fee due on October 18, 2007, the date the check was purportedly written, was only \$465.00. The 3 ½ year maintenance fee increased to its current level of \$490.00 on October 2, 2008, well after the check was purportedly written.

Even if the Office had received the \$490.00 check, it would not have been enough money. As stated previously, the 3 ½ year maintenance fee could have been paid from March 23, 2007 through September 23, 2007, or with a surcharge during the period from September 24, 2007 through March 23, 2008. On October 21, 2007, a \$65.00 "grace period" surcharge would have been due, as well. Thus, patentee would have owed \$465.00 + \$65.00 for a total of \$530.00.

As authorized, petitioner's credit card will be charged \$1,190.00 – a \$490.00 3 ½ year maintenance fee and the \$700.00 surcharge after expiration where delayed payment is unavoidable.

If petitioner does not wish to file a reconsideration petition, petitioner may, **in writing**, request a refund of the \$1,240.00 paid on October 8, 2010 and the \$1,190.00 submitted with the present petition. The request should be made in writing and addressed to: Mail Stop 16, Director of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, P. O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450. A copy of this decision should accompany petitioner's request.

The file does not indicate a change of address has been submitted, although the address given on the petition differs from the address of record. If appropriate, a change of fee address (form PTO/SB/47) and a request for customer number (form PTO/SB/125) should be filed in accordance with Manual of Patent Examining Procedure, section 2540. A courtesy copy of this decision is being mailed to the address on the petition. However, the Office will mail all future correspondence solely to the address of record.

Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be addressed as follows:


By mail: Mail Stop PETITION
Commissioner for Patents
Post Office Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

By hand: U.S. Patent and Trademark Office
Customer Service Window, Mail Stop Petition
Randolph Building
401 Dulany Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

By FAX: (571) 273-8300 - ATTN: Office of Petitions

By internet: EFS-Web
www.uspto.gov/ebs/efs_help.html
(for help using EFS-Web call the
Patent Electronic Business Center
at (866) 217-9197)

Telephone inquiries concerning this matter may be directed to the undersigned at (571) 272-3230


Shirene Willis Brantley
Senior Petitions Attorney
Office of Petitions

CC: ARTHUR BARRY COLEGRAVE
21/68 REMUERA ROAD
REMUERA, AUCKLAND 1050
NEW ZEALAND